IN MEMORIAM

Leo Lowenthal, 1900–1993

"I never wanted to play along,"[1] Leo Lowenthal titled his memoirs. He never did. Those who identify the study of public opinion with polling might do well to learn more about the career and works of this remarkable sociologist. For 6 years, from 1949 to 1955, as research director of the Voice of America, he headed up one of the largest and most talented teams of opinion researchers who ever worked for the U.S. government. It included such notable pollsters as Ralph White, Joseph Klapper, Helen Kaufmann, Hedi Ullmann, and Marjorie Fiske (to whom Lowenthal was long married); it conducted a far-ranging series of surveys on the communication habits of people all over the world. The surveys were fielded abroad by a variety of newly hatched research organizations, and they played a significant part in training European, Asian, and Latin American survey practitioners in the empirical American tradition.

Daniel Lerner's book *The Passing of Traditional Society,* based on field work conducted in the Middle East by Robert Carlson and William Millard, is just one illustration of the notable contributions that Lowenthal's unit made to the study of international communications. This was applied social research in the best sense. It examined radio listening and reading in relation to the social, political, and cultural conditions of the societies in which it occurred, and it combined a respect for scientific objectivity with a practical concern for the uses to which the information would be put by program producers fighting the propaganda cold war in its most bitter hours. (For much of this time they were also protecting their backsides against McCarthyite attacks. One of the senator's zealous staff members, William F. Buckley, Jr., investigated Lowenthal and found no subversive taint.)

It wasn't skill as a survey methodologist that brought Lowenthal to this important job; it was his aptitude as an analyst of literary meanings. He was the junior staff member in a group of leftist German academicians—led by Max Horkheimer and including Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Erich Fromm—who, in 1923, founded the Institute of Social Research

1. This is a loose translation of the original: *Mitmachen wollte Ich nie.*

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at the University of Frankfurt (from which, after a brief stint in the Kaiser's army, he had just received his doctorate).

Lowenthal's primary interest was in the social roots of literature, as manifested, for example, by the changing relationships of writers to their publics, when leisure and literacy expanded to create mass audiences. The Institute moved lock, stock, and barrel to the University in Exile at the New School for Social Research when the Nazis came to power. Lowenthal abandoned his 10,000-volume library. He taught the sociology of knowledge at Columbia University and was a colleague of Paul Lazarsfeld's and Robert Merton's at the Bureau of Applied Social Research, where he applied his analytical skill to popular culture. (His study of popular biographies in American magazines, "The Triumph of Mass Idols," was included in *Radio Research, 1942–43,* edited by Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton.) He moved to the Office of War Information in Washington, evaluating the Fascist radio and press. (Ruth Benedict was at the adjacent desk.) Lowenthal was fascinated by the dynamics of charismatic authoritarianism, to the attraction exercised by those whom he styled "Prophets of Deceit," in a book coauthored with Norbert Guterman.

It was Lowenthal's exquisite aptitude at content analysis that first brought him to the attention of Foy Kohler, the director of the Voice of America. After Kohler, the Voice was absorbed into the USIA bureaucracy and weakened by McCarthyism, budget cuts, and an endless succession of politically appointed directors. Lowenthal found a haven at the University of California, Berkeley, where he remained for the rest of his life. (His widow, the former Susanne Hoppmann, directs the university's German cultural center.) Though a staunch adversary of totalitarianism, he supported the radical free speech movement at Berkeley that set off the campus uprisings of 1968. (His vacation house became the hideaway for Herbert Marcuse when that guru of the New Left was being hounded by the press.)

As the last survivor of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Lowenthal became a figure of great interest to a new generation of German social scientists, for whom he embodied the best intellectual traditions to the Weimar Republic. He was interviewed on countless television talk shows and awarded such honors as the Great Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic, Hesse's Goethe Prize, Frankfurt's Adorno Prize, and honorary degrees from the Free University of Berlin and the Universities of Siegen and Hamburg. His autobiographical reflections and five volumes of his collected essays were published in German before they appeared in Transaction Books' English translation.

Urbane, erudite, subtle-minded, and witty, exuding a world-weary irony, Lowenthal suffered no fools gladly and wielded a razor-sharp

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